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ABSTRACT

A former Fellow briefly describes in this presentation at a symposium "Scholars Working in Congress: The Impact of the Congressional Science Fellowship Program on the Field of Child Development" the knowledge/skill-based and socialization-based approaches designed to teach developmental psychologists to operate as professionals at the interface of child development and social policy formation. Integration of these two approaches in a course of instruction is discussed, and themes around which such instruction can be organized are delineated. Teachers are urged to recognize that (1) they are training developmental psychologists to make choices different from those of the traditional graduate student; (2) the role of the traditional mentor is often not appropriate in the context of training students to effectively influence policy decisions; (3) they should not pretend to know everything about social policy; (4) they should instill realistic expectations about the role of scientists in the policy arena without promoting cynicism; and (4) they should make sure students appreciate the special value of their "traditional" training as psychologists. Concluding remarks focus on the lack of publishing opportunities for developmental psychologists who want to write about social policy; recommendations for addressing this problem are made. (RH)

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From Congress to Classroom: Effect of the Fellowship on Teaching and Publication

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[Presentation for SRCD symposium, "Scholars working in Congress: The impact of the Congressional Science Fellowship Program on the Field of Child Development," April 27, 1985, Toronto, Canada.]

My charge today is to discuss how the Fellowship affects teaching and writing. In keeping with the mix of fact and opinion that I was called upon to offer as a Fellow, my remarks will reflect both personal perspective and the results of a survey I conducted a year ago of former Congressional Fellows.

I will start with teaching. At John Master's conference on Training and Research in Child Development and Social Policy, held two years ago at Vanderbilt University, two approaches to educating students for roles in child development and social policy were discussed.

The first approach involves instilling a foundation of knowledge and skills in students who are contemplating careers that blend policy and scientific expertise. The components of this training include substantive issues of child policy, the policymaking process, and methods of policy analysis and program evaluation. This approach is based on an image of policymaking as a systematic, rational process that is shaped by those with knowledge and skills.

The second approach emphasizes the socialization of students into the world of policy. It addresses the personality or spirit of policy work, both in terms of the personal qualities that are likely to enhance an individual's enjoyment and effectiveness in policy settings -- a sense of humor, quick-wittedness, inventiveness, flexibility, contentiousness, and so on -- and in terms of the work environment that constitutes the "ecology" of policy work. This approach attempts to provide realistic opportunities for students to assess their suitability for work that integrates science and policy. It also acknowledges that there are personal characteristics and job demands that will interact with knowledge and skills to determine effectiveness.

My own approach to training incorporated both approaches. My intent was to intill a rudimentary knowledge base and then to create opportunities for students to use it in ways that approximate the tasks of a scientist working in a policy setting.

I started by asking myself, "What are students going to need to

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be effective "hybrids" who can converse in both scientific and policy circles?" They need a knowledge base, as implied in the first approach. I had a curriculum that covered different perceptions of the policy-science interface (both optimistic and pessimistic), an overview of the federal policy process and policymaking institutions, an introduction to methods of policy analysis, and a smattering of topical policy issues used as case studies.

Students also need to appreciate, in a very personal and first-hand way, what it is like to be thrust into the political fray, with its dilemmas, its multiple perspectives on any issue, and its persistent sense of urgency. The conduct of policy is not primarily a rational process. The challenge facing the instructor is to take the rational teaching process and use it to transmit some of the irrationality and spirit of politics. Some of this can be accomplished in a classroom; much of it cannot.

In the classroom, I required that my students role-play situations that approximated some of those they might meet up with in policy settings. One assignment involved writing a two-page briefing memo using government and other sources, phone calls to legislative, agency, and advocacy staff, and press articles. Each student then used the memo as a starting point for a debate aimed at persuading me to adopt their recommendations for action. I also orchestrated a mock hearing, letting the students select the "crisis" that provoked the hearing, and assigning roles to them as Members of Congress, staffers, press agents, and witnesses (including two researchers with conflicting data). A final experiment involved a graduate seminar constructed around a Childwatch Project. The project was based on a national citizen monitoring model designed by the Children's Defense Fund and the Association of Junior Leagues to survey local officials and service providers about recent changes affecting the delivery of children's services. It goes without saying, that much of this experiential learning must occur beyond the classroom through internships, collaborations, and fellowships.

Running through-out my teaching were several themes that will probably be more useful to you as students and teachers than my idiosyncratic approach to teaching policy.

First, keep in mind that you are basically training students to make choices, different choices than those of the traditional graduate student. Students seek policy training for a wide variety of reasons. Some want to know what this policy business is all about and may never be seen or heard from again. Some want to conduct research that can inform policy issues as well as theoretical questions. Some are contemplating academic careers that will accommodate their dual interests in policy and

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research. And others aspire to nonacademic positions in which they can apply their scientific expertise directly to policy issues.

Second, the role of traditional mentor is often not appropriate. Unlike traditional academic coursework and advising, in the area of policy we are not necessarily training students to "be like us". Students who pursue policy interests scatter widely -- witness the Congressional Fellows -- and in the process may not confirm our own professional choices as being the best option for themselves. For some, training students to be conversant with social policy issues may be less rewarding as a consequence.

Third, don't pretend to know everything about social policy (as you might about language development or social cognition). As a teacher of social policy who is fundamentally a psychologist and who approaches policy issues from within this disciplinary perspective, it was important for me to acknowledge what I did NOT know, and to provide opportunities for students to learn other important skills and perspectives.

Fourth, instill realistic expectations about the role of scientists in the policy arena without creating a generation of cynics. In addition to assigning readings that discuss both opportunities and contraints for scientists who attempt to inform policy debates, I tell a lot of stories. This is something I learned from own policy teacher, Ed Zigler. By the time I arrived in Washington, D.C. as a new Ph.D., I had learned from Ed's stories that, for instance, my scientific background would not be accepted as proof that I would be an adept policy advisor, that Congressional mandates for "further study" are often issued as a delay tactic rather than as a genuine quest for knowledge, and that the credibility of a scientist increases directly with her proximity to the Congressman's district. So I tell stories that transmit the spirit of things in politics. Along these lines, I found that students craved "life histories" of developmental psychologists who had pursued nonacademic careers. Policy is such an unfamiliar territory to most graduate and undergraduate students, that it behooves the instructor to offer tangible examples of the "interface". Providing examples of actual policy positions held by psychlogists is one means of demystifying social policy.

Fifth, assure that students appreciate the special value of their "traditional" training as psychologists. While there are a lot of new skills to teach policy students (how to find and read the Federal Register, how to use the telephone to gather data, how to condense 20 pages of prose into a one-page memo), it is equally important that they respect and use their analytic and statistical skills, their familiarity with the research community, and their substantive understanding of psychological

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issues. Although policy positions inevitably require that one function as a generalist, skills in analyzing reports, interpreting statistical representations of information, and developing a line of questioning to reveal weaknesses in an argument are indispensible.

I was extremely fortunate, after my Fellowship year, to join a psychology department that was not only receptive to the idea of teaching its students about policy, but had already established a program within which to do this. This is rare and I realize some of you may be interested in returning to less hospitable departments to either teach or convince your faculty to teach a policy course. My advice is to start small. The analogy of convincing employers to support child care is probably apt. Rather than starting with a plan for an on-site child care program, its best to start with a brochure for employees on how to find child care. Why not add a lecture to your developmental psychology courses on policy issues and generate enthusiastic responses from the students? Then, you can begin to build a case for a policy course. Also, one warning, I found that it was very threatening to the political science and sociology departments to have psychologists teaching policy courses. Turf issues abound on campus as well as in the halls of Congress.

I want to conclude my comments on training by crediting the Fellowship program for making me a more effective teacher. And, there is one aspect of this that is particularly important. I could not have provided the experiences that I provided to my students without the former Fellows who remained in policy positions after the Fellowship year. Just as the Fellows' effectiveness in Congress was enhanced by our ability to work collaboratively, my effectiveness as a teacher was enhanced by my ability to gather resources from and to direct my students to former Fellows serving as committee staffers, advocates, policy analysts, and staff of voluntary and professional organizations.

Now for writing and publication. I mention both because, as we all learned when that first thin envelop came back from Child Development, they are not synonymous.

A year and a half ago, after writing a couple of articles based on my policy analyses for the Congressional Budget Office and on my year in Congress, and receiving a disturbing number of thin envelopes, I decided to survey former Congressional Fellows to see if I was just a terrible writer or if my disappointments were shared by others. To lend credibility to my personal agenda, the survey addressed one of the goals of the Fellowship program, namely "to educate the scientific community with regard to the development of public policy." What outlets are available and have been used successfully by the former Fellows to fulfill this goal? What audiences have been addressed by the Fellows' efforts

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to educate the scientific community? These are the questions I asked of the Fellows.

I received some good news and some bad news. The good news is that the Fellows are publishing material designed to inform the scientific community about the development of social policy. In fact, they are reaching far beyond the traditional scientific, that is academic, community in their efforts to share their lessons from the Fellowship experience. Speaking opportunities are used more extensively than publication outlets for this purpose, in part because they appear to be more readily available and less time-consuming to prepare.

The bad news is twofold. First, many of the respondents expressed concern that communicating policy information tended to occur outside the mainstream channels of communication in the child development community. There seems to be a separate, but equal, mentality guiding our discipline's publications. Accordingly, no Fellows had published articles designed to fulfill the education goal of the Fellowship had been published in Child Development or Developmental Psychology, and the four articles published in American Psychologist had been authored by the SRCD and APA professional staff at the invitation of the editors or had been ghost authored by a Congressional Fellow. Second, and related, a pattern emerged whereby the majority (80%) of the Fellows' publications were either solicited by editors of journals, edited volumes, or newsletters or were written by former Fellows serving as editors. If this pattern accurately reflects publishing opportunities for developmental psychologists who want to write about social policy, we are facing a relatively closed system.

A final result, which I think is important, concerns the disparity between the reports of former fellows in academic positions from those in nonacademic positions. Those in nonacademic positions reported far fewer publications and, correspondingly, felt that outlets were far less available, than did their academically-based colleagues. This may reflect the uncompromising pace of frontline policy work, or it may reflect the dearth of journals that will accept nonempirical articles, such as those tracing the legislative history of a major child-related bill or reviewing the role research played in setting a legislative agenda.

I also sought recommendations from the respondents. They tended to endorse options that would integrate policy activities (including publication) into preexisting structures within SRCD. One recommendation has been met already, namely to incorporate the SRCD policy module into the regular conference program. Other recommendations included:

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(1) creating opportunitites for the publication of policy articles in the SRCD journal, Child Development, perhaps starting by including an identified policy expert or two on the editorial board,

(2) informing former Fellows and others with policy backgrounds about opportunities to publish in the SRCD newsletter, without having to wait for a solicited article (this is currently true, but many young scholars do not realize it),

(3) expanding opportunities for those without any policy experience to gain some initial exposure without having to devote a full year to a Congressional fellowship. The summer institutes represent just such an opportunity. Other ideas included state-level fellowships, and shorter term fellowships in Washington that revolve around researching a specific issue rather than around a single Congressional placement.

To conclude, I will advance a recommendation that encompasses the survey comments, as well as the concerns expressed by my policy students. Just as the former fellows have come to value a range of activites, including publishing and teaching, as rewarding signs of professional accomplishment, I would like to see the Society for Research in Child Development expand the boundaries of what are considered appropriate and valued expressions of scholarship. It is time that the Society create a vehicle for publishing careful analyses of the role played by research in the formulation of state and federal legislation, for acknowledging the vital contributions of developmental psychologists who have worked to salvage federal research funds, and for highlighting academic programs that have devoted faculty slots to hiring policy-research hybrids. These are only a few examples of the orientation that is required if the Society is to nurture the major strides it has already made in supporting the comingling of scientific and policy endeavors.

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